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AUTHOR McClain, Anita
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ABSTRACT

This guide contains a short introduction on the value of teaching poetry in elementary school and some ideas on how it should be taught. The guide presents seven classroom activities to make poetry come alive. Seven figures illustrating the activities are included. (MS)

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Keep a Poem in Your Pocket

Anita McClain

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Keep A Poem In Your Pocket

Many students do not like poetry. How can teachers instill children with a love for poetry? Where should one begin? What kind of poetry and which poems are particularly motivating and enjoyable?

One of the most comprehensive studies conducted regarding children and poetry was written in 1974 by Ann Terry. Her study reveals that children are the best judges when selecting poetry they will enjoy. In general, they prefer humorous poems, especially nonsense poems such as limericks. Enjoyment of particular poems crosses grade levels. Girls tend to prefer poetry more than boys.

On the other hand, there are some cautions regarding the use of poetry with children. Do not force children to memorize poems. If they truly enjoy a poem they will want to hear it again and again. At that point the poem begins to be memorized automatically. Notice the word "hear" - - poetry is meant to be heard. It is an oral art form. When students hear an extensive variety of poems, they begin to enjoy and appreciate its musical qualities. Once they are hooked it is then time to slowly begin discussing the elements of a favorite poem. Analysis, if done too often, too early with unpopular poems, will kill the motivation and enjoyment. Children who go from Mother Goose to Tennyson wonder why they hate poetry!

Likewise, the teacher should select poetry s/he personally enjoys. Positive enthusiasm will be modeled for students when teachers share their favorites. To nurture and instill a love for poetry, students must hear poems they can understand, poems with humor and poems the teacher believes are worth sharing.

> If teachers provide experiences that get students actively involved in reading, sharing, discussing, and writing poetry, the level of their appreciation and response to poetry should be raised. (Terry, 1974, p. 56)

Activities to make poetry come alive

1. As previously stated, research indicates that boys need greater motivation regarding poetry than do girls. A collection guaranteed to interest boys is Rolling Harvey Down the Hill by Jack Prelutsky (1980). Simply reading these poems may not be enough. In keeping with the theme of the poetry collection, have the students make a paper box clubhouse. Students copy their favorite poems to store in the clubhouse. See Figure 1.

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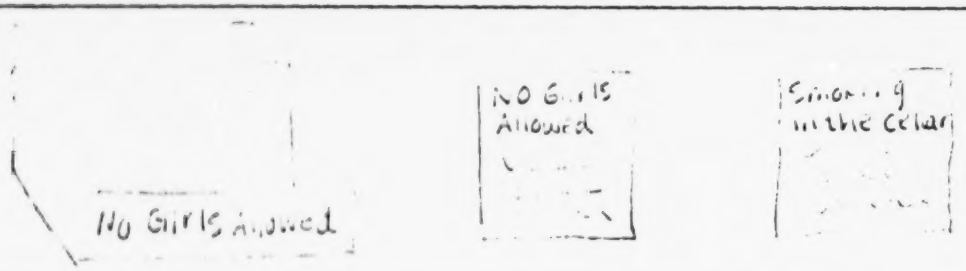


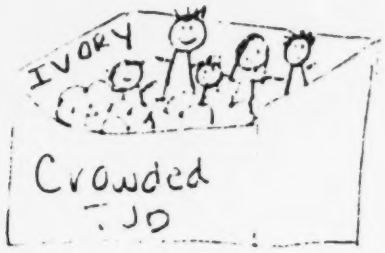
Figure 1. Clubhouse box.

2. Children enjoy humorous limericks. The Book of Pigericks by Arnold Lobel is a popular collection. Have the children make pig masks. On the back of each write a limerick and then dramatize the poem using the mask as a costume. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Pig masks.

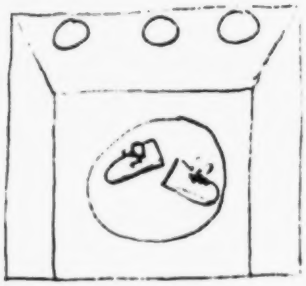
3. Boys and girls enjoy poetry by Shel Silverstein. "Crowded Tub" is very humorous, and all children can identify with taking a bath - - but maybe not with "too many kids in the tub!" Have the students make a box tub and cut out several children to put in the tub. On each paper child a line of the poem has been written. See Figure 3.

4. Boys and girls in Oregon can identify with muddy tennis shoes. Thus, a poem that for them is easy to understand might be "Muddy Sneakers" by Kennedy. Make a washing machine with a door made of plastic wrap. Place tennis shoes, real or paper, in machine. On each shoe is a line from "Muddy Sneakers." See Figure 4.



Use cotton for suds.
Use Ivory soap label to line tub.
Figures each have a line of the poem.

Figure 3. "Crowded Tub."



Use a box with lid that opens.
Lines of poem written on shoes.
Drop into machine as you read each.

Figure 4. Washing Machine.

5. How many students have seen the movement of lightning? To convey that movement make a poetry collage using a poem such as "Storm" by Myra Cohn Livingston. See Figure 5.

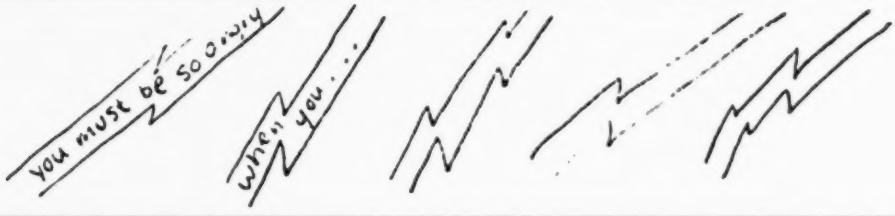
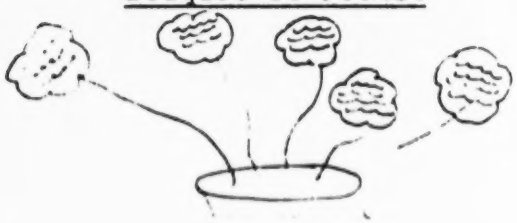


Figure 5. Lightning.

6. For students who wish to become familiar with a variety of poetic structures, an activity that involves the copying of excellent model poems may help. To motivate students to copy favorite poems the instructor needs to find ways to display their endeavors. See Figure 6.

Bouquet of Poems:



Use florist wire flower stems. Styrofoam or "Oasis" can be used for the base. Write and mount poems on paper flowers.

Figure 6. Poem Bouquet.

Bulletin Boards:

Cover a bulletin board with the Sunday comics. Mount humorous poems on construction paper to place on the board.

Cover bulletin board with a black and white printed newspaper. Title the board: Extra, Extra Read All About It! Mount poems on black paper and place on board.

Shape Books:

Collect and copy poems on a concrete topic, such as trees or leaves. Secure in a book cover and cut in the shape of the topic. Collect and write poems in a student bound book.

7. Special Fun:

Birthday:

Gift wrap a box and a lid with birthday paper. Copy poems onto a variety of birthday paper squares and store in box. Write poems on balloons. Fill clear balloons with small pieces of paper on which a poem has been written.

Puzzles:

Find poems about animals. Make tissue collage animals mounted on paper, copy poem above, below or right over the animal. Cut into shapes to be used as a jigsaw puzzle.

Halloween:

Copy poems, roll-up and tie with black and orange ribbon (scroll fashion) store in jack-o-lantern. Share poems during week of Halloween.

Christmas:

Copy a poem onto shapes that represent the interpretation of the poem. Fold in accordian fashion so top shape is the cover, see Figure 7.

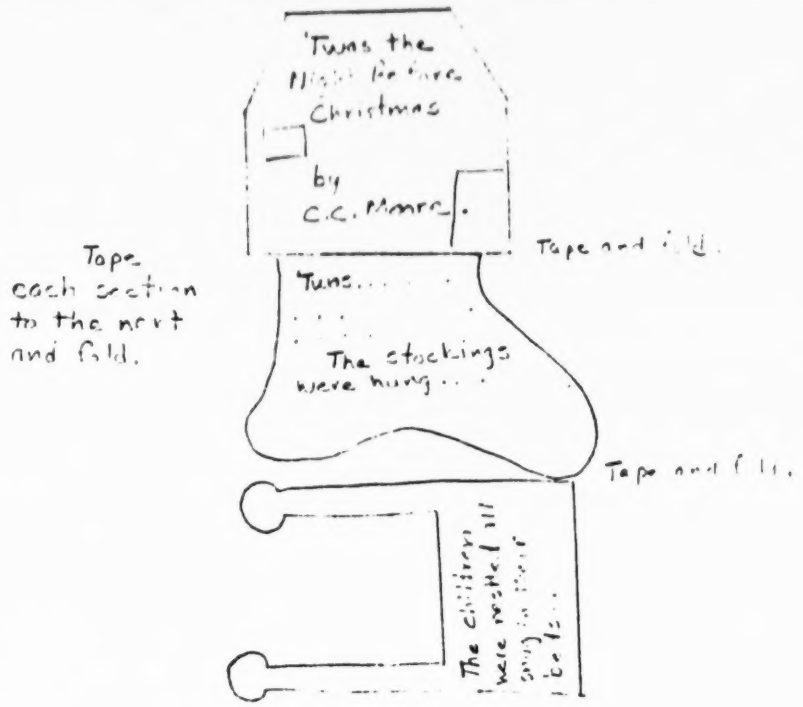


Figure 7. Shape poem.

In conclusion, share poetry daily. Share poems you truly enjoy. Encourage students to have fun with poetry. Place poetry in its proper perspective - - an art form, particulary the art of oral communication and interpretation reinforced with artistic self expression of art projects. Carefully select poetry that is easy to understand and is enjoyed by the students and be sure it reflects the teacher. If it does, the instructor will share it with the enthusiasm necessary for an auditory art form. Instuctors should make certain they have a good number of favorite poems readily available - - "keep a poem in your pocket."

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Submitted by Anita McClain, Pacific University, Forest Grove, OR.

Thanks to my methods students for some of their creative ideas.